GEORGE K. HOFFMAN

Columnist, Antiquarian, Chronicler of Olden Days

By HEINZ KLOSS

STUTTGART

IN THE WINTER of 1930-31 Wm. S. Troxell with untiring oblingingness took me along in his car to sundry Pennsylvania German authors whom it otherwise might have taken me years to find out about. I shall always be grateful to him. Among the men to whom he introduced me was George Kohler Hoffman, a retired teacher, among whose pupils at one time Troxell, known far and wide as Pumpernickle Bill, had been, and who besides was one of his predecessors as a dialect contributor to the Allentown Morning Call.

George K. Hoffman was born at Neffs, Lehigh County, October 30, 1872. From 1890 to 1930 he taught in the public schools of North Whitehall, Lowhill, Heidelberg and Washington Townships in Lehigh County. Thereafter he retired and has been living ever since at Neffs, the place of his birth.

His Pennsylvania German letters to The Morning Call in which he used the pen-name "Yukel Dryfuse" appeared in the early years of this century. Among a number of undated clippings in my possession there is one which on the back carries a notice regarding an auction to be held in 1913. His dialect letters sparkle with local gossip and comments on the foibles of his neighbors. We offer the following specimen:

Brief vum Yukel Dryfuse

De onner vuch war ich in Allentown un we ich fum station nuff bin hovich de old Lucinda Schnopshankel uff am pavement owe g'droffa. De Lucinda un era mon sin om arshda Abrill noch dar schtod g'zoya, un mer sand awe shun us see schtolzer ward un may uff zu dar schnitz. De Lucinda is shun hoch in dar ochzich yore, our sell mochd all nix ous un gade nimmond nix owe, our was mich schwetza mochd fun era is des, os see shun so old is un is noch es pavement nunner g'fora mit roller skates un hut sich awe by gosh zimlich gute on dar keck kolda.

De Bevy Blumsock hut en lawn party kot om lechda Somshdog ovet. De Nudletowner Schnood Band hut de music g'mochd. Dar Iky Schneller hut es nooshorn g'piffa, dar Efrom Heckaboom hut es ringbone g'schpield, dar Yunie Yeppelfield hut de drum g'blosa. We dar Gaveral Zitterwackel es boss horn g'blosa hot, hut's eva gor net schtimma vulla un no hut are es mole ous nonner g'mochd, un no wor's don by jimpses ken vunner us es net g'schtimt hut, de rotta hen en neshd drin kot. Siver grosa rotta sin rous g'schprunga. De rotta hen hinkel federa, glay schprow un welshcorn grutza in's harn g'droga kot. We de rotta ob g'stard sin, hut's our en g'grish geva by dar maid. See sin all uff g'boga, un venicher us ken zite warn see all uff dar schteel un hen all g'mochd us won see hobble skirts hetten. So'n rotta g'schichd hut don en arick war wase g'mochd. We de Bevy de refreshments g'served hut, ware see noch bissel zitterich un fashitt de knovloch sup uff am Efrom Schneller sy wida hussa us es eam in de schlippers g'luffa is. Eye, eye; sech'd de Bevy, we see es g'sana hut. Dar Efrom hut net grood gewist was letz war un hut g'mand see vut eam an buss geva, so hut are sich fore g'boga un es moul in folda g'lakd. De Bevy hut g'schwind ear soch he g'stelled un is g'schprunga far dar obwesh lumba un we see kumd, hut see don by golly an windel. On denne party hen see aw stories far zald. Dar Iky hut g'sood es ware mole an shiff ivers say kumma un unner wakes ware an groser fish ons shiff kumma un het so arick g'schwenzeld us es shiff shere um g'folla ware, un so hetten see mole an orange ins say g'schmissa far den fish schtill zu mocha, our are het de orange gons 'gschluked, no hen see an box mit oranges nous g'schmissa, our dar fish hut see gons g'schluked. An vunerlicha olda fraw hut sich zu wide ivers shiff nous g'boga far alles zu sana un falled don ins wasser un dar groos mulley schlukd awe de old fraw. No hen see our era zarra g'stupped un hen onera g'danka grikd. See hen den grosa fish g'shussa mit ra huller flint un hen den fish uff g'schnitta. We see den fish uff g'schnitta hen kot, was denkd ear leava lide us kappened war mit dara olda frow, eye, see hut uff am schtule kukd un hut de oranges far kofd, zwa far finfa.

Dar Gaveral Zitterwackel is an graduate fun dar Uxa Schule un is bissel mupsich un no hen see ean awe g'frooked far'n schtory. Dar Gaveral hut so schlow ous g'stard un sechd are het an mon owe g'druffa de onner vuch us ken arm kot het un het an gross sine uff dar brushd mit grosa bush doga, "It is not money that I want." No froaked don de Bevy so harzofdich: "Was hut are don g'vulled?" Dar Gaveral huts moul bissel g'schlecked un de douma pore mole rum g'drade un sechd, "Zwa arm far sy oldie dricka."

Yukel Dryfuse

Here is another example, a report from the fabulous Middle West:

Brief fum Yukel Dryfuse

Mr. Morning Call:

My uncle fun dar West war de onner vuch ons Biffel's reunion. Are hut g'mand de lite in unserm welt dale daten sich don arick placera un de wibeslite waren arick g'schickd far guta socha zu bocka.

Are hut g'soad de wibeslite in dar West kenten ushd hoffa-kase un zvivela-brie mocha. Es brode vu se bocka ware so zomma g'knogedar bumbânickle us za g'nunk ware far spare blocks on an fere giles vogar. De schnitz boy wara so solid g'pockd us mer druff donsa kent. De millich so belsich we an gumma klutz. Dar uncle hut our de reunion gute ey g'numma un hut mit g'mochd us won are alles ouswennich wist. Are war in dar peanut race un in dar bag race. We are in dar sock jumpa hut vulla, hut are g'mand dar sock ware so hefdich far drade. Iver dem jumped an kotz rous un schprinkd by impses dem alda mon iver si g'glesuredar kup. Es hut an arick excitement geva, our de kotz hut sich on dar narfa kova us see net ob g'schlipped is. Es hut am by geo g'mand us won an wild kotz ivern ice barick nuff schprinkd. So gates eva denna orma drep mit dar bludda kep.

Dar uncle hut g'soad de crops wara sha un gute in dar West, our are sechd es soch date gons onershda voxa we do. Es welshkon ware so hoch us yader schduck an schdickel hova mist us es net ob brecha date. Yader schduck gabed siver kolver un won es net free rifa gabed, date's noch an shaner kolver on dar schdickel geva. De karapsa voxa uff der bame we ebbel, un unich yadem bome mus an sign si, "Beware of the pumpkin," udder dry vucha un siva dog in de jail. Dar hover hut de rishpela im grund un de grumbara voxa uff dar hecka ve hucklebara. De keshdar ekela warn g'used for am hund an neshd mocha, us are net so solid schlofd. Are hut g'soad es ware on dale pletz so barich us de lite schpara un dar kee hova misten, us see sich holda kenda. Do kend mer aw sawyar we dar Ike Schdelgorn, we are si'm schwar de galassa farissa hut, "Look out for de bridging."

YUKEL DRYFUSE

There are certain parallels between the activities of the subject of this sketch and those of Harry Hower, alias Hans Brannhulce. Both wrote occasional dialect poetry even though Hower seems to have been far more prolific a dialect poet than Hoffman. Both, in addition, wrote profusely in English. Both prepared dialect dictionaries which so far have remained in manuscript. Both cherished the dream of writing and of course publishing some day a volume of Pennsylvania German prose. With Hower it was to be a volume of fiction. Hoffman, on the other hand, whose bent is that of an antiquarian rather than of an artist, dreamed of a number of sketches depicting times and tools, manners and things as they were long ago. The overall title was to be "Wee's Farolders War."

But while, to my knowledge, no trace has been found of Hower's planned-for Pennsylvania German tales, Hoffman has made a real beginning. He was good enough to hand me two sketches which he thought might become the opening section of his book. I was interested in them partly for the subject-matter they contained, partly also because they once more showed at work a Dutchman desirous of bettering the status of his mother-tongue, this time by means of using it for non-fictional prose.

Here are the two sketches given me a quarter of a century ago:

WEE'S FAROLDERS WAR

I

Farolders hen de lide net g'labed we now, un doch hen see an farkneechd lava g'feerd. De kinner hen see imma Chrishdlichar wake uff g'zoyar. Im plotz fun feel candy kaufa far see sees mocha hen see ena zucker uffs brode un hen ena zucker brode geva. De hobshda sarta candy warn zucker-stangel un blackjack. De kinner hen net feel shpeelsoch kot while net feel zu kaufa war, so hen see sich bahulfa dar beshda wage us see g'kenned hen we dar old fodder Bumberschwangel won sy fees alls uff g'luffa warn un hut sy olda rins laderna shtivel net ous zeyar kenna, won are alls ins bed is, no hut are alls sich ins bed g'laked un de fees in dar schtivel zum bed nous kenkd. Dale fun dar kinner hen alls g'schpeeled see warn an butcher un hen sy ous bobbier g'schnidda un hen see g'butchered. Onera kinner hen an pore olda schtievel eye g'shpond un hen see farn schtule g'stelled woo see g'used hen farn woga woo see druff kukked hen mitra grosa shwing in dar hond woo see alls g'used hen far dar schtivel fierich in de ribba flatcha. Dale kinner hen sich an monicher ovet farwiled won ara daddy see kova hut far aram daddy dar bogger board schtrala un schtricha. Garmayner hond hut yader mon won are mole kired hut kot so'n longer bogger board g'raised us are g'kend hut. De groos mudder hut awe an wake kotta far de kinner blessera un des war "Ridy, Ridy, Gile," woo see de bay iver nonner g'laked hut un hut an kind uff dar foos kokd, on dar hand kova un see rida mocher mit ous ma soddle. Dale kinner hen de kotza g'knoched us de kotza farshtruveled g'gucked hen us won mer an oldy bree kluck es hinershd feddershd darich de klopp board fence g'zoyar het. De kinner wora mit kotza hore we de Sallie Knibbelbeg won see alls fun dar shire is kumma fum biffel melga.

Dar Groosfodder

II

Farolders hut shere yader familia an koo kot, won sie eischt an schtick lond kot hen so groos we'n grooser debbich. Sell zite huts ken creamery konna kot un awe ken milich separaters. De milich is darich an sy duch ksied wara far dar schmutz un dreck rous sippa. No is de milich in heffa g'doo wara bis dar roam sich over druff g'shoffed hut far obromer. Dar roam is imma budderfoss zommer g'drayed wara. An budderfoss is an foss we an onner foss, our es hut fligel inside instods outside we an older honer far dar budder zomma flotcher. Oft moles hut dar knecht udder de maud dar budder zommer drayer missa. Dar daudy hut awe also mole budder g'drayed our also mole hut are es net schdanda kenna a bardich wons arick g'schtobed un g'neveled hut. De mommy hut awe also mole budder g'drayed our see hut also mole so bissel fle stanglish g'fluched won de kee old melkich warn udder dar roam so din war im zettel us dar budder net zomma ga hut wolla.

Es war an g'wissie familia denna era kee warn so din os see shere ken shodda may mocha hen kenna won see in dar sun g'schtonna hen, un de milich war so mot un din us mer'n fishel sana het kenna im buttom fum amer, no hen de lide g'mand de kee wara farhexed. Des ding is alls aryer wara we dar alda maid era runsela. Endlich sin see zum hexa ductor. We dar ductor kummer is, hut are de socha unersucht, de milich g'examined, uns budderfoss ous g'schweveled. Don sechd dar ductor now ware noch a ding us are sana mist un des ware dar kee schtol. We are in dar kee schtol kumma is hut are alla ecka ous k'suchd far schwova un schpeck mice our hut kenni k'funna. No hut are mole in de hay g'guk'd no hut are don by hedas fum kee schtol nuff in de farshd fum doch g'sana wile es fuder all war un de kee nix zu fressa hen kot. Dar ductor hut no k'sot see sutta now pore load hoy kaufa un dar top fum kee schtol gute ba decka mit un dar kee plenty zu fressa geva da fun, sell ware dar ansichd wake far de hexa ous driva.

De Egyptians hen an onera wake far budder mocha. See nemma an gase hout, filla see holver full mit milich. De gase hout hanka see on an bome un schwanka see hinnersich un farsich bis es budder is.

Dar Groosfodder

(George K. Hoffman's own original orthography was retained in the above dialect selection—Ed.)

For Alfred L. Shoemaker's brief article "Yukel Dryfuse" see The Pennsylvania Dutchman, Vol. IV, No. 15, 1953—Ed.